

Congressman Bill Pascrell's Livable Communities Newsletter – Solutions for Cleaner, Safer Living

June, 2002

Issue V

Dear Colleagues:

With the impending arrival of the reauthorization of TEA-21, our thoughts begin to turn to how can we expand our Livable Communities priorities within the intermodal transportation framework.

Over the past year Congressional panels have begun to focus on a host of issues including highway programs, public transit systems, safety, metropolitan planning, intelligent transportation, and innovative solutions. It is important to get input from throughout the nation on all these critical issues. Each one must be considered with livability in mind.

In this issue we raise some of these issues and examine possible solutions.

In addition, our recent briefing featuring the National Council for Sciences and the Environment highlighted the roles that science can play in our efforts to attain sustainable communities. I urge you to take a look at the synopsis of the briefing that we include in this month's issue.

As always, if you have any questions about any of these innovative programs, please feel free to contact my office at 225-5751.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Pascrell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Affecting Surface
Transportation Policy:
Bettering Lives by
Improving Communities**



Congressional efforts to renew *Transportation Equity Act for the 21 Century* (TEA-21) got off to an early start in the wake of President Bush's budget request for the new federal fiscal year that begins October 2, 2002. As a result of revised revenue estimates, the Administration's budget plan called for a reduction in federal highway spending by \$8.6 billion. The proposed 27 percent cut from \$31.8 billion this year to \$23.2 billion followed the letter of TEA-21, whereby annual highway spending is calibrated with anticipated Highway Trust Fund receipts through a process known as revenue aligned budget authority, or RABA.

Before the FY03 budget was released on February 4th, it was generally assumed that this year would be the time when committee hearings would examine a host of issues. Organizations and other interests were expected to develop recommendations for revisions to the statute, all in preparation for action next year on TEA-21 renewal. Unfortunately, the transportation community has been focused on finding legislative solutions to the Fiscal Year 2003 funding shortfall. What is particularly troublesome is that the adjustment occurs in the final year of the six-year TEA-21 law, setting a low spending baseline at just the wrong time. As Congress works to renew TEA-21 next year, budget assumptions and other budget rules affecting future spending commitments are linked to the '03 baseline.

In passing the Highway Funding Restoration Act, Congress and the Administration seem to have worked out adding 'at least' \$4.4 billion for a minimum of \$27.7 billion in FY2003. Since

working out funding levels, Congressional panels have begun to focus on a host of issues including highway programs, public transit systems, safety, metropolitan planning, intelligent transportation, and innovative solutions. It is important to get input from throughout the nation on all these critical issues. Each one must be considered with livability in mind.

Transit initiatives that make commuters lives easier, for both the transit riders and even those who continue to drive. Transit is a key element to what we seek in livable communities. Convenient, efficient, safe and environmentally friendly projects have been the benchmark under TEA-21. As a key element of intermodal transportation, we must work to assure that guaranteed transit funding is included in the reauthorization. This funding allows for not only heavy rail and bus systems to maintain and expand service, but also allows for innovative projects such as light rail, jitney buses, and bus rapid transit. Choices in transportation mode

are key for transit agencies to choose what is right for individual communities and at the backbone of improving people's lives.

With billions spent on highways and transit, walking and bicycling should certainly be travel choices for Americans have the option make based on health and livability reasons alone. However, safety issues sometimes make these alternatives difficult. When we talk about transportation, cannot forget the importance of promoting safety. It is a key element when we talk about improving our constituents' quality of life. Intersections are disproportionately responsible for pedestrian deaths and injuries. Almost 50 percent of combined fatal and non-fatal injuries to pedestrians occurred at or within the typical intersection environment in every Congressional district.

This becomes critically important for our children. It used to be that everyone walked to school. However, due in part to dangerous intersections, it seems that walking and biking to school is becoming a thing of the past.

The recent report issued by the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) found that the number of kids walking to school dropped 23% from 1990 to 1995. It's estimated that only 10% of all U.S. schoolchildren now walk to school. This is not only an issue for children and their fitness. It also affects the quality of life for parents as they do not have to drive their children to work in the morning. Rather, they can allow them to walk or bike and be confident in their safety.

In TEA-21, Congress amended the safety set-aside language to include "bicycle, pedestrian and traffic calming" projects as eligible expenditures in addition to the traditional types of programs that have historically funded guard rails, medians and shoulders. As we prepare for reauthorization, we must ensure that safety programs are adequately funded and state transportation authorities work on achieving more livable communities.

Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) were a critical addition to the

transportation planning process in the original ISTEA bill. The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority has done an outstanding job of dealing with congestion, air quality, and community concerns in a densely populated region. Rather than allowing state DOTs the unilateral authority to decide the location, mode, and allowable costs of transportation projects, MPOs allow for greater local input in decision-making. Many MPOs have seen a strong amount of public participation over the years. People want a voice in transportation, such a fundamental part of their communities. In the reauthorization, we may want to consider ways to make the process more open, by allowing a greater voice to local concerns like environmental groups, transit workers, and industry. Transparency is important to advocating smart growth policies.

As the Congress prepares for reauthorization of federal surface transportation programs, there will be many opportunities to craft legislation that can improve our communities. Sound

transportation investments are the backbone of the American economy and social fabric. We must be sure that federal dollars spent not only maintain, but improve quality of lives. Transportation affects every part of Americans' lives, from physical fitness to the ability to hold a job and buy a home, to safety and security.

**NCSE Report:
Recommendations for
Achieving Sustainable
Communities**



The National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE) has a mission to improve the scientific basis for environmental decision-making. NCSE is supported by nearly 500 organizations, including universities, scientific societies, government associations, businesses and chambers of commerce, and environmental and other civic organizations.

On May 22, 2002, I co-hosted a bipartisan, bicameral NCSE Livable Communities Task Force event. The briefing was supported by the Senate Northeast-Midwest Coalition, Representative Blumenauer, Co-Chair of the Livable Communities Task Force, Representative Quinn, Co-Chair of the Northeast-Midwest Coalition, and Representative Sherwood Boehlert, Chairman of the Science Committee. The briefing marked the release of the NCSE's report entitled "Recommendations for Achieving Sustainable Communities." This far-reaching document underscores new approaches for creating strong economies and healthy communities and provides constructive approaches to address complex issues such as economic development vs. ecosystem protection.

As a part of the congressional briefing, editors of the report presented the "Top 10 Keys To Sustainable Communities." These "keys" identify the crucial aspects of achieving sustainable communities at the local, regional and national levels. The report calls for "community

learning centers” and greater hands-on involvement of scientists, engineers, planners and educator with local communities. Cultivating this interaction is necessary to provide leadership to define the vision, train future leaders and to link information, values and action. Additionally, community participation is essential for scientific and technical information to be incorporate into the policymaking process.

Support for the report has been strong on both sides of the aisle. Local decisions to attain sustainable communities can have a tremendous global ripple effect, altering regional, national and international stability and security. In fact, the report will be provided to leaders meeting at the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa.

Planning for sustainability needs to be based on the social, economic and human health needs of the most vulnerable populations, not just the most vocal. The recommendations in this report provide a roadmap to overcome the challenges in balancing

economic development and ecosystem protection. For more information on the report, visit www.NCSEonline.org.